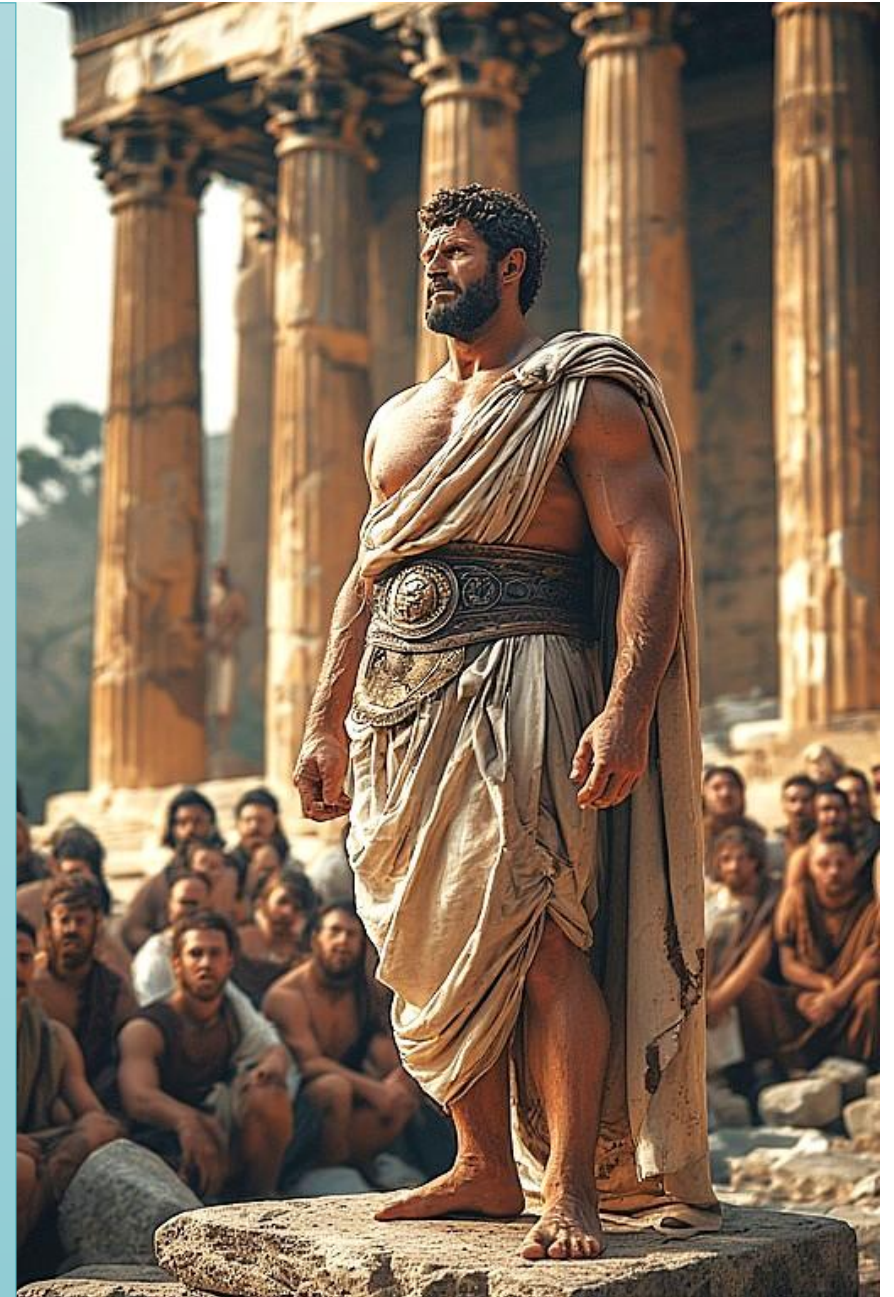
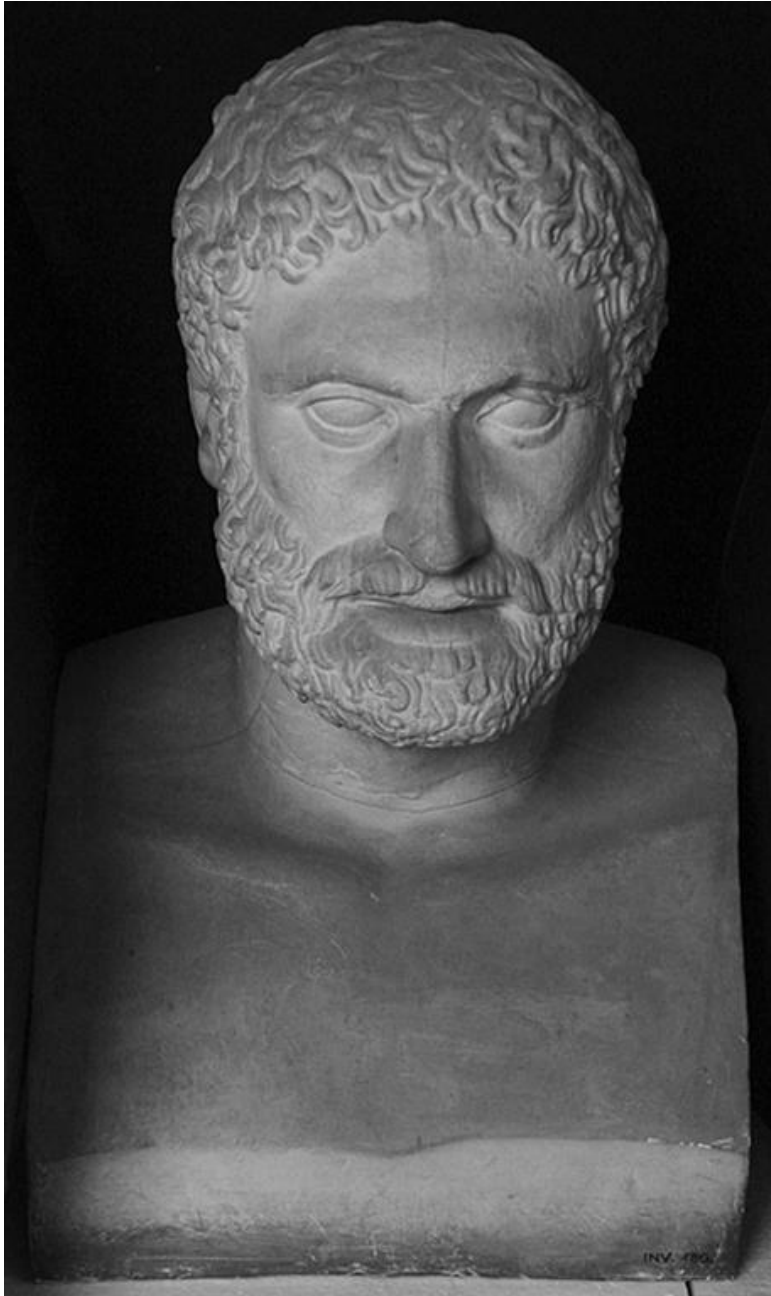


PISISTRATUS



PISISTRATUS ; c. 600 BC – 527 BC) WAS A POLITICIAN IN ANCIENT ATHENS, RULING AS TYRANT IN THE LATE 560s, THE EARLY 550s AND FROM 546 BC UNTIL HIS DEATH. HIS UNIFICATION OF ATTICA, THE TRIANGULAR PENINSULA OF GREECE CONTAINING ATHENS





PISISTRATUS

, along with economic and cultural improvements laid the groundwork for the later pre-eminence of Athens in ancient Greece. His legacy lies primarily in his institution of the Panathenaic Games, historically assigned the date of 566 BC, and the consequent first attempt at producing a definitive version of the Homeric epics. Pisistratus's championing of the lower class of Athens is an early example of populism. While in power, he did not hesitate to confront the aristocracy and greatly reduce their privileges, confiscating their lands and giving them to the poor. Pisistratus funded many religious and artistic programs, in order to improve the economy and spread the wealth more equally among the Athenian people. Pisistratids is the common family or clan name for the three tyrants, who ruled in Athens from 546 to 510 BC, referring to Pisistratus and his two sons, Hipparchus and Hippias.



Background

Ancient Greek governments were typically monarchies in the 10th and 9th centuries BC. In the 7th and 6th centuries, political power began to be wielded by aristocratic families, who had accumulated wealth, land, and religious or political offices as the Greek city-states developed. The most notable families could trace their lineage back to a legendary or mythological founder/king, such as Herakles or an ancestor who participated in the Trojan War, for example. In the 6th and 5th centuries BC, prominent aristocratic families of Athens were the Pisistratids, Philaids, and the Alcmaeonids. The Pisistratid clan traced their ancestry back to Neleus of Pylos, father of the Homeric hero Nestor, who fought in the Trojan War. The second clan, the Alcmaeonids, came to prominence in the 6th century BC during the lifetime of their namesake Alcmaeon and whose son, Megacles, both opposed and supported Pisistratus at various points in his reign. Due to the infighting between aristocratic families and the inability to maintain order, a tyrant was well-positioned to capitalise on the discontent of the poor and disenfranchised to make a bid for power. In the age of antiquity and especially in the Archaic Age of Greece, a tyrant was not viewed in the modern sense of the definition, but rather, a ruler who obtained power unconstitutionally, usually through the use of force, or inherited such power.

In the first documented instance of Athenian tyranny, Herodotus notes the story of Cylon, an ancient Olympic Games champion, who gathered supporters, in either 636 or 632 BC, in an attempt to seize power by occupying the Acropolis. His attempt was unsuccessful and despite assurances to the contrary, Cylon and his supporters were allegedly killed by the Alcmaeonids, resulting in the Alcmaeonid curse. Related to Pisistratus through his mother, Solon was an Athenian statesman and lawmaker who, in the early 6th century BC, restructured the social class system of Athens as well as reformed the law code, originated by Draco.

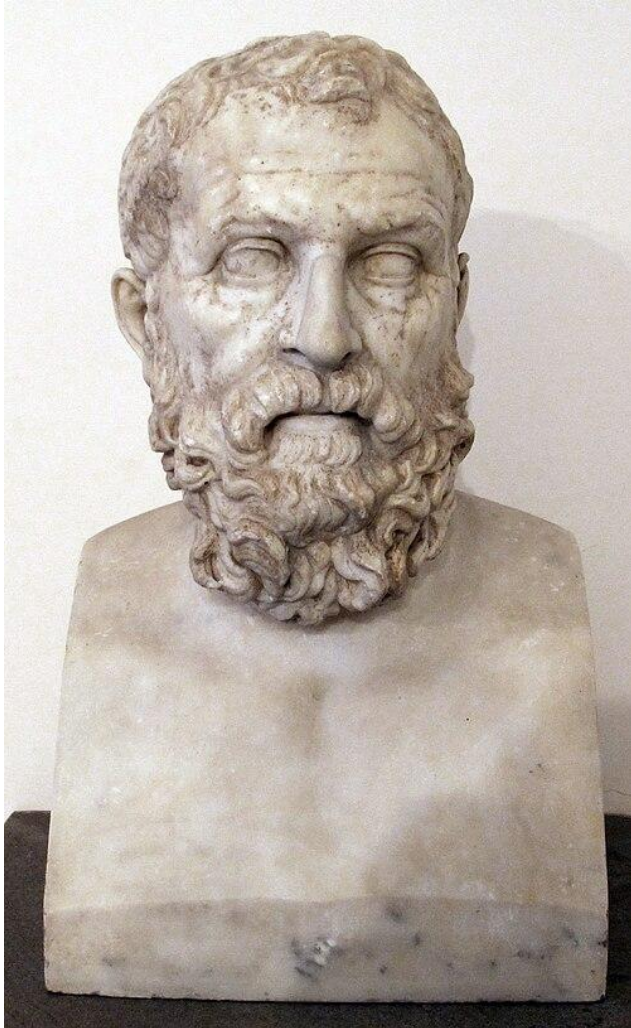


Location of Attica region on the mainland of Greece

Pisistratus was a native of the deme of Philaidae near Brauron in eastern Attica. Not much is known about the early years of Pisistratus's life, but his father, Hippocrates, attended the Olympic Games in either 608 or 604, and during a sacrifice to the gods, the meat was said to have been boiled without a fire, as witnessed by Chilon the Lacedaemonian. As a result of this sign, Chilon recommended that Hippocrates send away his wife, if she could bear children, and if he had a son, to disown him. Hippocrates did not follow Chilon's advice, and later, he had a son named Pisistratus. Originally, Pisistratus became known as an Athenian general who captured the port of Nisaea (or Nisaia) in the nearby city-state of Megara in approximately 565 BC. This victory opened up the unofficial trade blockage that had been contributing to food shortages in Athens during the previous several decades.



Among his many reforms, Solon eliminated debt slavery, which primarily affected poor Athenians, who were in the majority, giving the demos the common people of the city-state collectively a concession to ease their suffering and possibly preventing a civil war. Pisistratus's later rise to power would draw on support from many of the poor people composing this constituency.



Solon was an archaic Athenian statesman, lawmaker, political philosopher, and poet. He was one of the Seven Sages of Greece and is credited with laying the foundations for Athenian democracy. Solon's efforts to legislate against political, economic and moral decline resulted in his constitutional reform overturning most of Draco's laws.

Solon's reforms included debt relief later known and celebrated among Athenians as the seisachtheia (shaking off of burdens). He is described by Aristotle in the Athenian Constitution as "the first people's champion". Demosthenes credited Solon's reforms with starting a golden age. Modern knowledge of Solon is limited by the fact that his works only survive in fragments and appear to feature interpolations by later authors. It is further limited by the general scarcity of documentary and archaeological evidence covering Athens in the early 6th century BC. Ancient authors such as Philo of Alexandria, Herodotus, and Plutarch are the main sources, but wrote about Solon long after his death. Fourth-century BC orators, such as Aeschines, tended to attribute to Solon all the laws of their own, much later times.

Early life and ancestry

Solon was born in Athens around 630 BC. His family was distinguished in Attica because they belonged to a noble or Eupatrid clan. Solon's father was probably Execestides. If so, his lineage could be traced back to Codrus, the last King of Athens. According to Diogenes Laërtius, he had a brother named Dropides, who was an ancestor (six generations removed) of Plato. According to Plutarch, Solon was related to the tyrant Pisistratus, for their mothers were cousins. Solon was eventually drawn into the unaristocratic pursuit of commerce.

Defeat of Megara

When Athens and its neighbor and rival in the Saronic Gulf, Megara, were contesting the possession of Salamis, Solon was made leader of the Athenian forces. After repeated disasters, Solon was able to improve the morale of his troops through a nationalist poem he wrote about the island. Supported by Pisistratus, he defeated the Megarians either by means of a cunning trick[15] or more directly through heroic battle around 595 BC. The Megarians, however, refused to give up their claim. The dispute was referred to the Spartans, who eventually awarded possession of the island to Athens on the strength of the case that Solon put to them. Plutarch professes admiration of Solon's elegy. The same poem was said by Diogenes Laërtius to have stirred Athenians more than any other verses that Solon wrote:

**Let us go to Salamis to fight for the island
We desire, and drive away from our bitter shame!**



"Solon demands to pledge respect for his laws", book illustration (Augsburg 1832)

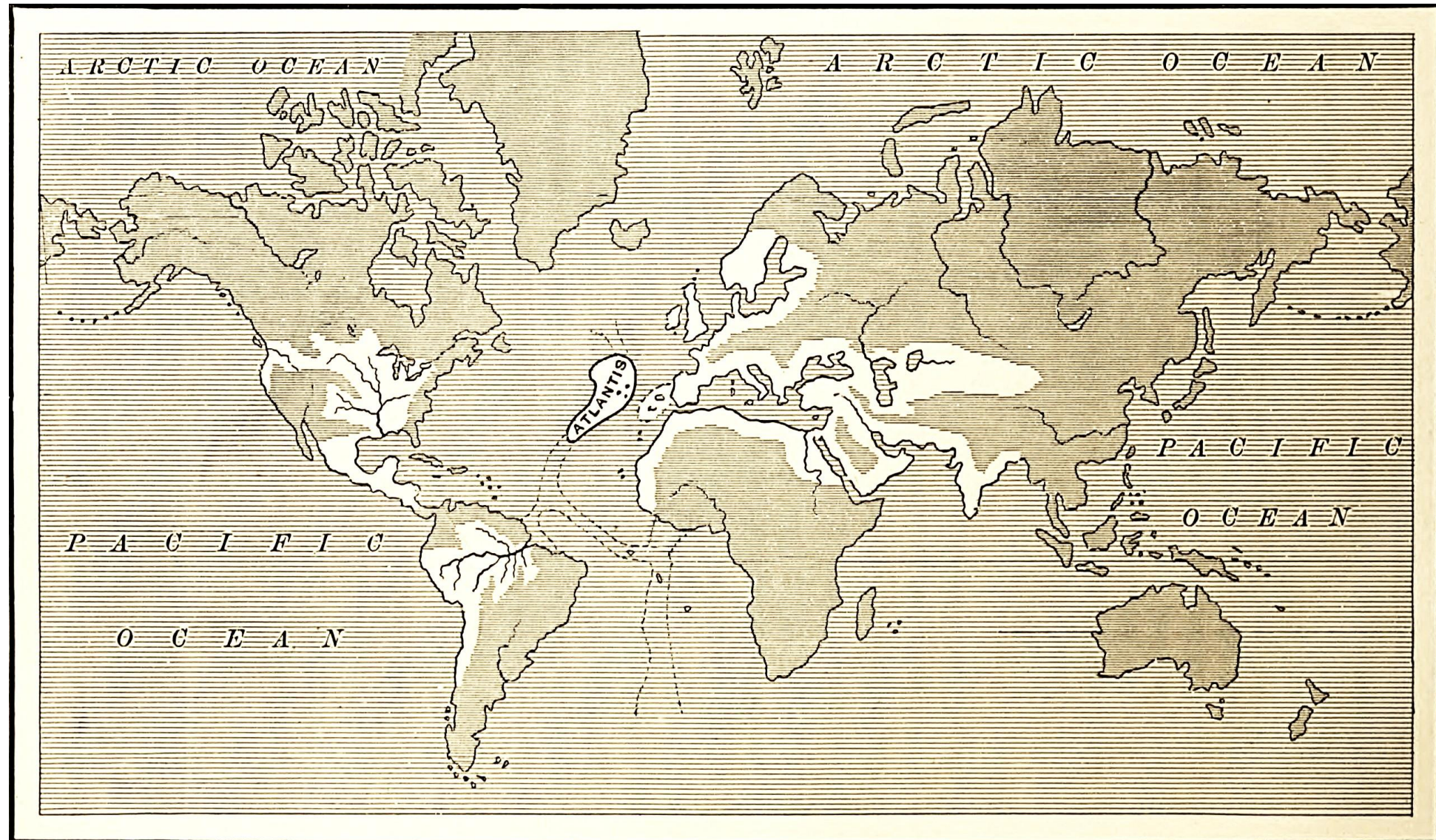
According to Diogenes Laertius, in 594 BC, Solon was chosen archon, or chief magistrate. Solon repealed all of Draco's laws except those relating to homicide.

During Solon's time, many Greek city-states had seen the emergence of tyrants, opportunistic noblemen who had taken power on behalf of sectional interests.[b] Solon was described by Plutarch as having been temporarily awarded autocratic powers by Athenian citizens on the grounds that he had the wisdom to sort out their differences for them in a peaceful and equitable manner. Some modern scholars believe these powers were in fact granted some years after Solon had been archon, when he would have been a member of the Areopagus and probably a more respected statesman by his peers.

As archon, Solon discussed his intended reforms with some friends. Knowing that he was about to cancel all debts, these friends took out loans and promptly bought some land. Suspected of complicity, Solon complied with his own law and released his own debtors, amounting to five talents (or 15 according to some sources). His friends never repaid their debts.



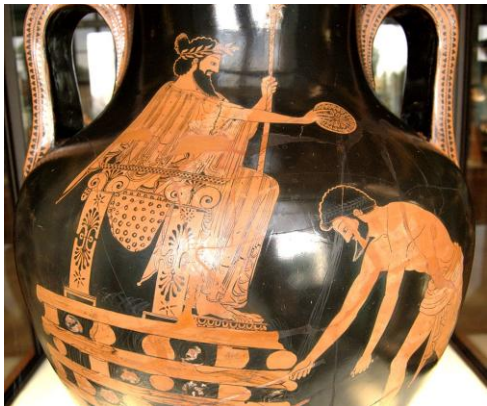
Solon is Plato's source for the story of Atlantis



After completing his work of reform, Solon surrendered his extraordinary authority and traveled abroad for ten years, so that the Athenians could not induce him to repeal any of his laws.

Within four years of Solon's departure, the old social rifts re-appeared, but with some new complications. There were irregularities in the new governmental procedures, elected officials sometimes refused to stand down from their posts and occasionally important posts were left vacant. It has even been said that some people blamed Solon for their troubles. Eventually one of Solon's relatives, Pisistratus, ended the factionalism by force, thus instituting an unconstitutionally gained tyranny. In Plutarch's account, Solon accused Athenians of stupidity and cowardice for allowing this to happen.

Solon's first stop in his travels was Egypt. There, according to Herodotus, he visited the Pharaoh of Egypt, Amasis II. According to Plutarch, he spent some time and discussed philosophy with two Egyptian priests, Psenophis of Heliopolis and Sonchis of Sais. A character in two of Plato's dialogues, Timaeus and Critias, claims Solon visited Neith's temple at Sais and received from the priests there an account of the history of Atlantis. Next, Solon sailed to Cyprus, where he oversaw the construction of a new capital for a local king, in gratitude for which the king named it Soloi.



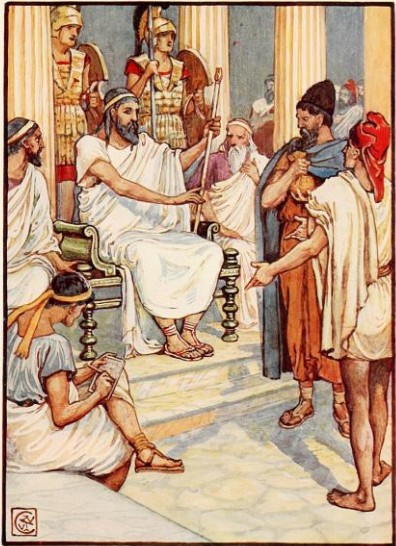
Croesus awaits fiery execution (Attic red-figure amphora, 500–490 BC, Louvre G 197)

After his return to Athens, Solon became a staunch opponent of Pisistratus. In protest, and as an example to others, Solon stood outside his own home in full armour, urging all who passed to resist the machinations of the would-be tyrant.



His efforts were in vain. Solon died shortly after Pisistratus usurped by force the autocratic power that Athens had once freely bestowed upon him. Solon died in Cyprus around the age of 70 and, in accordance with his will, his ashes were scattered around Salamis, the island where he was born.

Pausanias listed Solon among the Seven Sages, whose aphorisms adorned Apollo's temple in Delphi. Stobaeus in the Florilegium relates a story about a symposium where Solon's young nephew was singing a poem of Sappho's: Solon, upon hearing the song, asked the boy to teach him to sing it. When someone asked, "Why should you waste your time on it?", Solon replied, "ἵνα μαθὼν αὐτὸ ἀποθάνω", "So that I may learn it before I die." Ammianus Marcellinus, however, told a similar story about Socrates and the poet Stesichorus, quoting the philosopher's rapture in almost identical terms: ut aliquid sciens amplius e vita discedam, meaning "in order to leave life knowing a little more".



Solon, the wise legislator of Athens

The social and political upheavals that characterized Athens in Solon's time have been variously interpreted by historians from ancient times to the present day. The historical account of Solon's Athens has evolved over many centuries into a set of contradictory stories or a complex story that might be interpreted in a variety of ways. As further evidence accumulates, and as historians continue to debate the issues, Solon's motivations and the intentions behind his reforms will continue to attract speculation.

Two contemporary historians have identified three distinct historical accounts of Solon's Athens, emphasizing quite different rivalries: economic and/or ideological rivalry, regional rivalry, and rivalry between aristocratic clans. These different accounts provide a convenient basis for an overview of the issues involved.

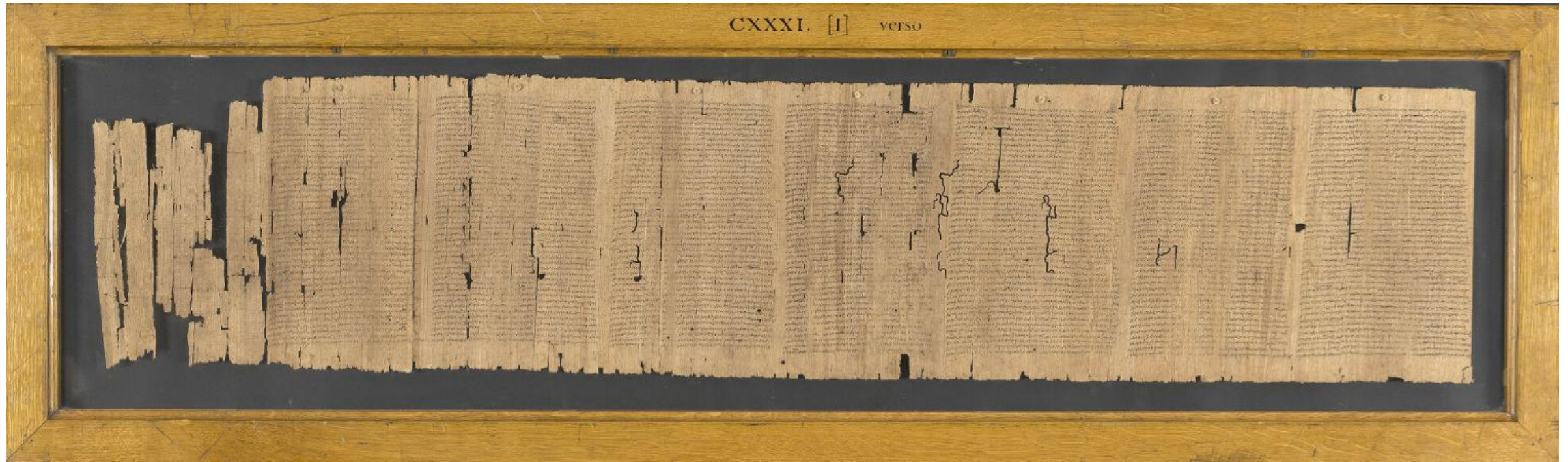
Economic and ideological rivalry is a common theme in ancient sources. This sort of account emerges from Solon's poems, in which he casts himself in the role of a noble mediator between two intemperate and unruly factions. This same account is substantially taken up about three centuries later by the author of the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia but with an interesting variation:

... there was conflict between the nobles and the common people for an extended period. For the constitution they were under was oligarchic in every respect and especially in that the poor, along with their wives and children, were in slavery to the rich...All the land was in the hands of a few. And if men did not pay their rents, they themselves and their children were liable to be seized as slaves. The security for all loans was the debtor's person up to the time of Solon. He was the first people's champion.

Here Solon is presented as a partisan in a democratic cause whereas, judged from the viewpoint of his own poems, he was instead a mediator between rival factions. A still more significant variation in the ancient historical account appears in the writing of Plutarch in the late 1st early 2nd century AD:

Athens was torn by recurrent conflict about the constitution. The city was divided into as many parties as there were geographical divisions in its territory. For the party of the people of the hills was most in favour of democracy, that of the people of the plain was most in favour of oligarchy, while the third group, the people of the coast, which preferred a mixed form of constitution somewhat between the other two, formed an obstruction and prevented the other groups from gaining control.

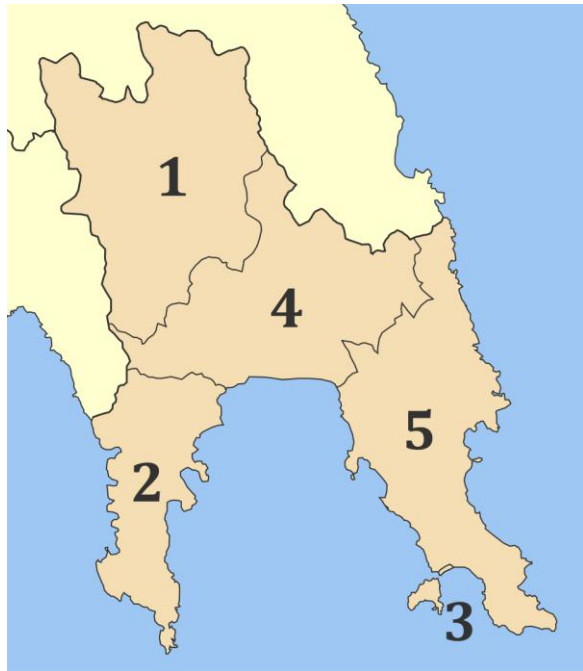




**THE ARISTOTELIAN CONSTITUTION OF THE ATHENIANS, NOW IN THE
BRITISH LIBRARY (PAPYRUS 131, F.6V).**

Regional rivalry is a theme commonly found among modern scholars. "The new picture which emerged was one of strife between regional groups, united by local loyalties and led by wealthy landowners. Their goal was to take control of the central government at Athens and with it dominate over their rivals from other districts of Attica.

Regional factionalism was inevitable in a relatively large territory such as Athens possessed. In most Greek city states, a farmer could conveniently reside in a town and travel to and from his fields every day. According to Thucydides, on the other hand, most Athenians continued to live in rural settlements right up until the Peloponnesian War. The effects of regionalism in a large territory could be seen in Laconia, where Sparta had gained control through intimidation and resettlement of some of its neighbours and enslavement of the rest. Attika in Solon's time seemed to be moving towards a similarly ugly solution with many citizens in danger of being reduced to the status of helots.







The Evrotas or Eurotas is one of the major rivers of the Peloponnese, in Greece. The river's springs are located just northwest of the border between Laconia and Arcadia, at Skortsinos. The river is also fed by underwater springs at Pellana and by tributaries coursing down from Mt. Taygetos and Mt. Parnon, which flank the Evrotas Valley to the west and east, respectively. The river is 82 kilometres (51 mi) long, flowing in a north-south direction and emptying into the Laconian Gulf. Its drainage basin is 2,239 km² (864 sq mi).

Laconia is bordered by Messenia to the west and Arcadia to the north and is surrounded by the Myrtoan Sea to the east and by the Laconian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea to the south. It encompasses Cape Malea and Cape Tainaron and a large part of the Mani Peninsula. The Mani Peninsula is in the west region of Laconia. The islands of Kythira and Antikythera lie to the south, but they administratively belong to the Attica regional unit of islands. The island Elafonisos, situated between the Laconian mainland and Kythira, is part of Laconia.

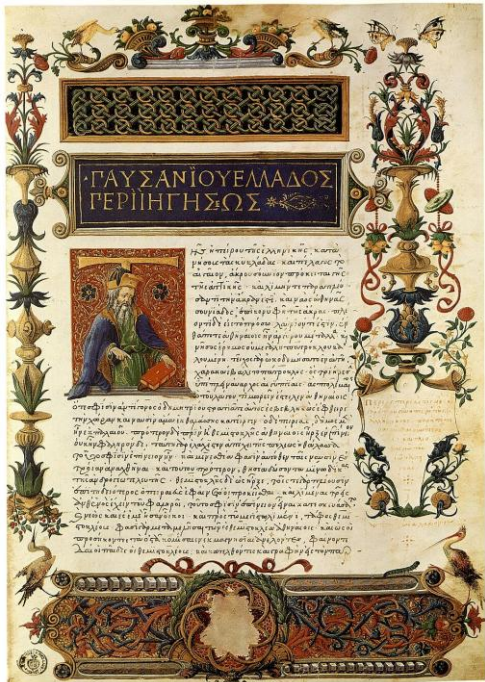
Rivalry between clans is a theme recently developed by some scholars, based on an appreciation of the political significance of kinship groupings. According to this account, bonds of kinship rather than local loyalties were the decisive influence on events in archaic Athens. An Athenian belonged not only to a phyle or tribe and one of its subdivisions, the phratry or brotherhood, but also to an extended family, clan or genos. It has been argued that these interconnecting units of kinship reinforced a hierarchic structure with aristocratic clans at the top. Thus rivalries between aristocratic clans could engage all levels of society irrespective of any regional ties. In that case, the struggle between rich and poor was the struggle between powerful aristocrats and the weaker affiliates of their rivals or perhaps even with their own rebellious affiliates.



Solon's laws were inscribed on axones, large wooden slabs or cylinders attached to a series of axles that stood upright in the Prytaneion. Originally the axones recorded laws enacted by Draco in the late 7th century (traditionally 621 BC). Nothing of Draco's codification has survived except for a law relating to homicide, yet there is consensus among scholars that it did not amount to anything like a constitution.

During his visit to Athens, Pausanias, the 2nd century AD geographer reported that the inscribed laws of Solon were still displayed by the Prytaneion. Fragments of the axones were still visible in Plutarch's time but today the only records we have of Solon's laws are fragmentary quotes and comments in literary sources such as those written by Plutarch himself. Moreover, the language of his laws was archaic even by the standards of the fifth century and this caused interpretation problems for ancient commentators. Modern scholars doubt the reliability of these sources and our knowledge of Solon's legislation is therefore actually very limited in its details.

Generally, Solon's reforms appear to have been constitutional, economic, moral, and sexual in their scope. This distinction, though somewhat artificial, does at least provide a convenient framework within which to consider the laws that have been attributed to Solon. Some short-term consequences of his reforms are considered at the end of the section.



The beginning of the „Description of Greece“ in the manuscript Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 56.11, fol. 1r. a lengthy work that describes ancient Greece from his firsthand observations. Description of Greece provides crucial information for making links between classical literature and modern archaeology,

Depending on how we interpret the historical facts known to us, Solon's constitutional reforms were either a radical anticipation of democratic government, or they merely provided a plutocratic flavour to a stubbornly aristocratic regime, or else the truth lies somewhere between these two extremes. Before Solon's reforms, the Athenian state was administered by nine archons appointed or elected annually by the Areopagus on the basis of noble birth and wealth.



**THE AREOPAGUS, AS
VIEWED FROM THE
ACROPOLIS, IS A
MONOLITH WHERE
ATHENIAN ARISTOCRATS
DECIDED IMPORTANT
MATTERS OF STATE
DURING SOLON'S TIME.**

Before Solon's reforms, the Athenian state was administered by nine archons appointed or elected annually by the Areopagus on the basis of noble birth and wealth. There was an assembly of Athenian citizens (the Ekklesia) but the lowest class (the Thetes) was not admitted and its deliberative procedures were controlled by the nobles. There therefore seemed to be no means by which an archon could be called to account for breach of oath unless the Areopagus favoured his prosecution.

According to the Athenian Constitution, Solon legislated for all citizens to be admitted into the Ekklesia and for a court (the Heliaia) to be formed from all the citizens. The Heliaia appears to have been the Ekklesia, or some representative portion of it, sitting as a jury. By giving common people the power not only to elect officials but also to call them to account, Solon appears to have established the foundations of a true republic.

There is consensus among scholars that Solon lowered the requirements – those that existed in terms of financial and social qualifications – which applied to election to public office. The Solonian constitution divided citizens into four political classes defined according to assessable property a classification that might previously have served the state for military or taxation purposes only.

The standard unit for this assessment was one medimnos (approximately 12 gallons) of cereals and yet the kind of classification set out below might be considered too simplistic to be historically accurate.



Pentakosiomedimnoi

**valued at 500 medimnoi or more of cereals annually.
eligible to serve as strategoi (generals or military governors)**

Hippeis

**valued at 300 medimnoi or more annually.
approximating to the medieval class of knights, they had enough wealth to equip themselves for the cavalry**

Zeugitai

**valued at 200 medimnoi or more annually.
approximating to the medieval class of yeoman, they had enough wealth to equip themselves for the infantry (hoplite)**

Thetes

**valued up to 199 medimnoi annually or less
manual workers or sharecroppers, they served voluntarily in the role of personal servant, or as auxiliaries armed for instance with the sling or as rowers in the navy.**

According to the Athenian Constitution, only the pentakosiomedimnoi were eligible for election to high office as archons and therefore only they gained admission into the Areopagus. A modern view affords the same privilege to the hippeis. The top three classes were eligible for a variety of lesser posts and only the thetes were excluded from all public office.

The real motives behind Solon's economic reforms are as questionable as his real motives for constitutional reform. Were the poor being forced to serve the needs of a changing economy, was the economy being reformed to serve the needs of the poor, or were Solon's policies the manifestation of a struggle taking place between poorer citizens and the aristocrats?

Solon's economic reforms need to be understood in the context of the primitive, subsistence economy that prevailed both before and after his time. Most Athenians were still living in rural settlements right up to the Peloponnesian War. Opportunities for trade even within the Athenian borders were limited. The typical farming family, even in classical times, barely produced enough to satisfy its own needs. Opportunities for international trade were minimal.

It has been estimated that, even in Roman times, goods rose 40% in value for every 100 miles they were carried over land, but only 1.3% for the same distance were they carried by ship and yet there is no evidence that Athens possessed any merchant ships until around 525 BC. Until then, the narrow warship doubled as a cargo vessel. Athens, like other Greek city states in the 7th century BC, was faced with increasing population pressures and by about 525 BC it was able to feed itself only in good years.



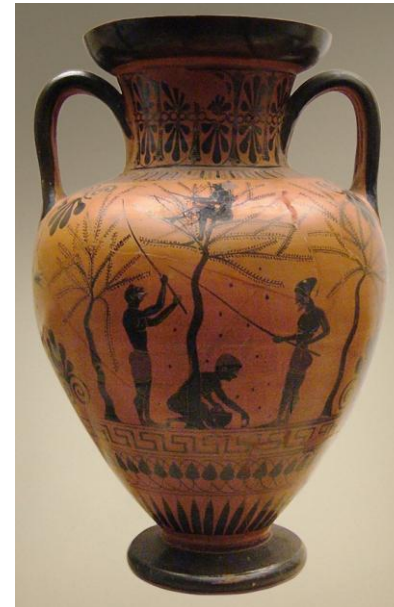
The Croeseid, one of the earliest known coins. It was minted in the early 6th century BC in Lydia. Coins such as this might have made their way to Athens in Solon's time but it is unlikely that Athens had its own coinage at this period.



The earliest coinage of Athens, c. 545–515 BC



Heracles and Geryon on an Attic black-figured amphora with a thick layer of transparent gloss, c. 540 BC



This 6th century Athenian black-figure urn, in the British Museum, depicts the olive harvest. Many farmers, enslaved for debt, would have worked on large estates for their creditors.



Solon's reforms can thus be seen to have taken place at a crucial period of economic transition, when a subsistence rural economy increasingly required the support of a nascent commercial sector. The specific economic reforms credited to Solon are these:

Fathers were encouraged to find trades for their sons; if they did not, there would be no legal requirement for sons to maintain their fathers in old age.

Foreign tradesmen were encouraged to settle in Athens; those who did would be granted citizenship, provided they brought their families with them.

Cultivation of olives was encouraged; the export of all other fruits was prohibited.

Competitiveness of Athenian commerce was promoted through revision of weights and measures, possibly based on successful standards already in use elsewhere, such as Aegina or Euboia or, according to the ancient account but unsupported by modern scholarship, Argos.

It is generally assumed, on the authority of ancient commentators, that Solon also reformed the Athenian coinage. However, recent numismatic studies now lead to the conclusion that Athens probably had no coinage until around 560 BC, well after Solon's reforms. Nevertheless, there are now reasons to suggest[99] that monetization had already begun before Solon's reforms. By the early sixth century the Athenians were using silver in the form of a variety of bullion silver pieces for monetary payments. Drachma and obol as a term of bullion value had already been adopted, although the corresponding standard weights were probably unstable.

In his poems, Solon portrays Athens as being under threat from the unrestrained greed and arrogance of its citizens. Even the earth (Gaia), the mighty mother of the gods, had been enslaved. The visible symbol of this perversion of the natural and social order was a boundary marker called a horos, a wooden or stone pillar indicating that a farmer was in debt or under contractual obligation to someone else, either a noble patron or a creditor.

Up until Solon's time, land was the inalienable property of a family or clan and it could not be sold or mortgaged. This was no disadvantage to a clan with large landholdings since it could always rent out farms in a sharecropping system. A family struggling on a small farm however could not use the farm as security for a loan even if it owned the farm. Instead the farmer would have to offer himself and his family as security, providing some form of slave labour in lieu of repayment. Equally, a family might voluntarily pledge part of its farm income or labour to a powerful clan in return for its protection. Farmers subject to these sorts of arrangements were loosely known as hektemoroi indicating that they either paid or kept a sixth of a farm's annual yield. In the event of 'bankruptcy', or failure to honour the contract stipulated by the horoi, farmers and their families could in fact be sold into slavery.

Solon's reform of these injustices was later known and celebrated among Athenians as the seisachtheia (shaking off of burdens). As with all his reforms, there is considerable scholarly debate about its real significance.

As a regulator of Athenian society, Solon, according to some authors, also formalized its sexual mores. According to a surviving fragment from a work ("Brothers") by the comic playwright Philemon, Solon established publicly funded brothels at Athens in order to "democratize" the availability of sexual pleasure.



While the veracity of this comic account is open to doubt, at least one modern author considers it significant that in Classical Athens, three hundred or so years after the death of Solon, there existed a discourse that associated his reforms with an increased availability of heterosexual contacts.

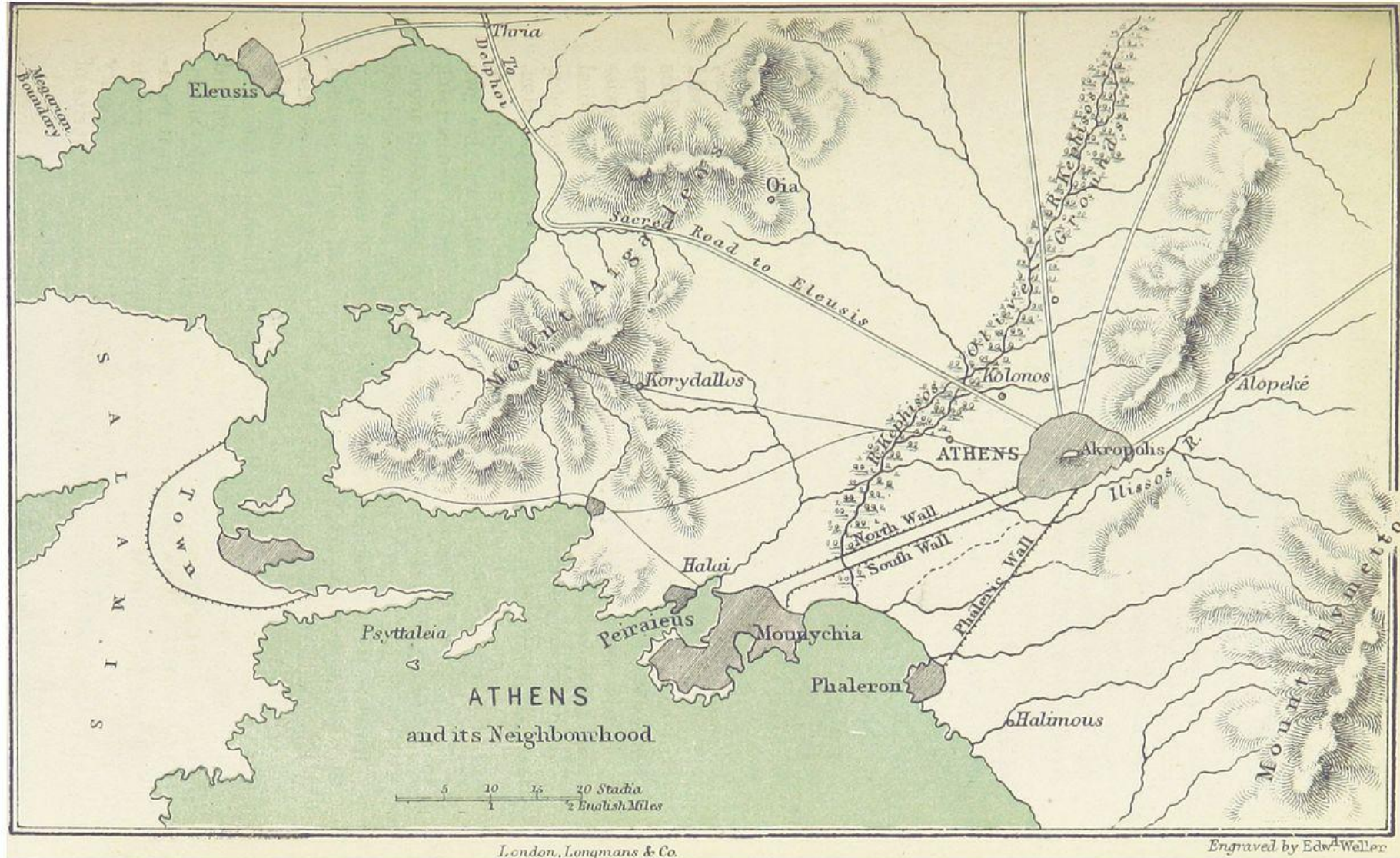
Ancient authors also say that Solon regulated pederastic relationships in Athens; this has been presented as an adaptation of custom to the new structure of the polis. According to various authors, ancient lawgivers (and therefore Solon by implication) drew up a set of laws that were intended to promote and safeguard the institution of pederasty and to control abuses against freeborn boys. In particular, the orator Aeschines cites laws excluding slaves from wrestling halls and forbidding them to enter pederastic relationships with the sons of citizens. Accounts of Solon's laws by 4th-century orators like Aeschines, however, are considered unreliable for a number of reasons



It is recorded that Solon wrote poetry for pleasure, as patriotic propaganda, and in defence of his constitutional reform. Solon's verses have come down to us in fragmentary quotations by ancient authors such as Plutarch and Demosthenes, who used them to illustrate their own arguments. It is possible that some fragments have been wrongly attributed to him and some scholars have detected interpolations by later authors. He was also the first citizen of Athens to reference the goddess Athena (fr. 4.1–4). The literary merit of Solon's verse is generally considered unexceptional. Solon's poetry can be said to appear 'self-righteous' and 'pompous' at times and he once composed an elegy with moral advice for a more gifted elegiac poet, Mimnermus.

Solon, depicted as a medieval scholar in the Nuremberg Chronicle

CITY OF ANCIENT ATHENS AND ITS SURROUNDING TOWNS. THE LONG WALLS SHOWN WERE NOT BUILT UNTIL THE 5TH CENTURY BC.



Pisistratus assumed and held power for three different periods of time, ousted from political office and exiled twice during his reign, before taking command of Athens for the third, final, and longest period of time from 546–528 BC.

His first foray into power started in the year 561 and lasted about five years. His first ouster from office was circa 556/555 BC after the other two factions, the Plains people led by Lycurgus and the Coastal people led by Megacles, normally at odds with each other, joined forces and removed him from power. Different sources provide conflicting or unspecified time intervals for the periods of Pisistratus's reign. For example, Herodotus writes that Megacles's and Lycurgus's followers combined after a short time to expel Pisistratus from power. Aristotle comments that Pisistratus was forced out during the year of the archonship of Hegesias, five years after he originally assumed his first tyranny in Athens.

In this period (557–556 BC), one of the Athenian polemarchs was Charmus of Kolyttus, who had been eromenos of Pisistratus. Charmus was the first Athenian to dedicate an altar to Eros, god of love. He was exiled for three to six years during which the agreement between the Pedieis (Plains) and the Paralioi (Coast) fell apart. Soon after, in the year 556 BC or so, Megacles invited Pisistratus back for a return to power upon the condition Pisistratus marry Megacles's daughter, Coesyra. According to Herodotus, the two men concocted a creative method to rally the people of Athens back to Pisistratus's side.

Soon after, Herodotus reports that Pisistratus, who had been previously married and had two grown sons, did not want to have any children with his new wife, the daughter of Megacles, and would not have intercourse with her in the traditional manner. Apparently, Pisistratus was unwilling to compromise the political futures of his sons, Hipparchus and Hippias.

Analysis of secondary sources regarding both the length, as mentioned previously, and the accomplishments of Pisistratus's first two tyrannies are conflicting and very sparse in details, respectively.



Location of cities of ancient Greece and neighbors; Mt. Pangaeus

Analysis of secondary sources regarding both the length, as mentioned previously, and the accomplishments of Pisistratus's first two tyrannies are conflicting and very sparse in details. For instance, Lavelle hypothesises that Megacles and the Alcmaeonids still held the majority of the political offices in the Athens government as part of the price and negotiation process that Pisistratus had to pay in order to become tyrant, and consequently, Pisistratus perhaps only functioned as a figurehead during his first two times in power.



During the three reigns of Pisistratus in the mid to latter part of the 6th century BC, Athens was beginning its transition to becoming the largest and most dominant of the cities on the Attic peninsula. Starr states that Athens was coalescing into the framework of a city, rather than a loose affiliation of neighbouring villages. Perhaps next in importance was Piraeus, the main port city of Attica, just 5 miles southwest of Athens, and this port location was key to granting Athens easy access to maritime trade opportunities and the ocean waterways. Other notable cities in Attica include Marathon and Eleusis.

One of the major areas of focus for Pisistratus and his government was the economy, and building and expanding on what his predecessor, Solon, had originally started. Pisistratus, likewise, had a two pronged approach: improve and modify agricultural production as well as expand commerce. In terms of agriculture, Solon had previously initiated a focus on the growth and cultivation of olives, which were better suited to the Athenian climate, as a cash crop. Pisistratus reintroduced a focus on olive production and in conjunction, he allocated funds to help the peasants outside the city of Athens, who were a key constituent bloc of his party, the Hyperakrioi, to obtain land as well as purchase tools and farm equipment. The small farmer loans were funded in large part by an assessment or tax on agricultural production, a rare documented example of an Athenian direct tax, at a rate of ten percent according to Aristotle. A secondary source reports that the tax was closer to five percent. Consequently, providing loans and monies to the rural residents surrounding Athens allowed them to continue working in the fields and to perhaps have them be uninterested in the politics of the city-state. Pisistratus also initiated a travelling system of judges throughout the countryside to conduct trials on location and even the tyrant himself would occasionally accompany these groups for inspection purposes and conflict resolution. At one point, Pisistratus appeared before the court in his own defence, charged with murder, but the prosecution/accuser dropped the charges, being reluctant or afraid to move forward in the case.

Popular tyrant

In ancient Greece, the word tyrant usually referred to those who seized power without legal right. Some tyrannies were short-lived while others, like Pisistratus's rule, could last quite long, even decades, if perceived to be a good tyranny and accepted by the people. By definition, tyrants obtained their ruling position by force or other unconstitutional means, and they did not inherit this authoritarian role in the manner of a king or via monarchical succession. However, once in power, many tyrants attempted to pass the mantle of leadership to their sons, as did Pisistratus. Usually, a tyrant would come from the ranks of fellow aristocrats, but would frequently rally the poor and powerless to their cause in a bid to obtain power, exemplified by Pisistratus when he formed the Hyperakrioi faction. To ease their transition into power and encourage societal security, tyrants could elect to keep the status quo for government institutions and laws, and even legacy officeholders, rather than purge them.

In Herodotus's view as documented in the Histories, after assuming power for the first time, Pisistratus managed the city of Athens even-handedly and fairly, maintaining the government and political office structure as is with no changes to existing laws. However, after reassuming control in 546 BC for his third stint as head of state, Herodotus says that he firmly established his tyranny with his mercenary force, increased his revenues from mining sources in Attica and Mount Pangaeus, placed opponents' children as hostages on the island of Naxos, and exiled both Alcmaeonids as well as other Athenian dissenters (whether by freely chosen exile or by force is unclear). Pomeroy reaffirms Herodotus's commentary regarding Pisistratus's third turn in power, adding that Pisistratus installed relatives and friends in the offices of various archonships and detained the children of some Athenians as hostages to deter future uprisings and discourage opposition.

Some of these actions would contradict the perception that Pisistratus ruled justly and followed the law. Aristotle seconds the initial remarks of Herodotus by characterising Pisistratus's reign as moderate and mild, describing the ruler as having a pleasant and tender disposition. As an illustration, Aristotle relates the case of a member of Pisistratus's entourage encountering a man tilling a stony plot of land and asking what the yield of this land was. The anonymous man responded that he received physical soreness and aches while Pisistratus received one-tenth of this yield. Due to his honesty, or perhaps his cleverness, Pisistratus exempted the man from paying his taxes. Aristotle also comments that Pisistratus's government functioned more in a constitutional manner and less like a tyranny.

Rosivach writes that the Pisistratid dynasty did not fundamentally change the government as originally created by Solon; instead, they maintained power by installing allies in important governmental positions, threatening force as needed, and using marriage alliances, all being tactics residing outside the constitution and law. Forsdyke chronicles the certain usage of Greek words by Herodotus in his Histories in reference to Pisistratus's tyranny and advocates that a society ruled by a tyrant has weak citizens while a democratic society has strong and free people.



Pisistratus died in 527 or 528 BC, and his eldest son, Hippias, succeeded him as tyrant of Athens. Hippias, along with his brother, Hipparchus, kept many of the existing laws and taxed the Athenians at no more than five percent of their income. In 514 BC, a plot to kill both Hippias and Hipparchus was conceived by two lovers, Harmodius and Aristogeiton, after Hipparchus had unsuccessfully solicited the younger Harmodius and subsequently insulted his sister. However, Hipparchus was the only one assassinated, and per Thucydides, was mistakenly identified as the supreme tyrant due to being the victim. However, Hippias was the actual leader of Athens, remaining in power for another four years. During this time, Hippias became more paranoid and oppressive in his actions, killing many of the Athenian citizens. The Alcmaeonid family helped depose the tyranny by bribing the Delphic oracle to tell the Spartans to liberate Athens, which they did in 510 BC. Following the capture of their children, Hippias and the other Pisistratids were forced to accept the terms dictated by the Athenians to recover their children and were exiled, being provided safe passage to Sigeion.

The surviving Pisistratid ruler, Hippias, eventually joined the court of King Darius of Persia, and went on to aid the Persians in their attack on Marathon (490 BC) during the Greco-Persian Wars, acting as a guide. Upon the fall of the Pisistratid dynasty in 510 and the deposition of Hippias, Cleisthenes of Athens ultimately triumphs in a power struggle, dividing the Athenian citizens into ten new tribes, creating a Council of Five Hundred as a representative assembly, and ushering in the age of democratic government in the year 508/507.

